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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000435

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF HEALTH INDICTED ON CORRUPTION CHARGES;
ANOTHER HEAD ROLLS

REF: FREETOWN 425

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (U) Summary: President Koroma removed the Minister of Health and Sanitation and the Minister of State in the Vice President's Office from their duties on November 4 due to allegations of corruption. Minister of Health, Sheiku Tejan Koroma, was indicted by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) for corruption related to procurement practices, while Minister of State Leonard Balogun Koroma has always had a cloud of suspicion around him. The President's actions came as a surprise to nearly all Sierra Leone politicians, and some suspect that they were deliberately timed to impress donors in advance of the Consultative Group meeting later this month. End Summary.

MINISTER OF HEALTH FACES THE COURT

¶2. (U) On November 4, Minister of Health and Sanitation Sheiku Tejan Koroma was formally indicted by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). The three-charge indictment included abuse of office, abuse of position, and willfully failing to comply with the laws, procedures, and guidelines relating to the procurement of property, tendering of contracts, and management of funds. The ACC alleges that the Minister awarded a contract for the supply of medical consumables and reagents in a manner that contravened the Public Procurement Act of 2004. Minister Koroma was relieved of his duties by the President for the duration of his trial, which has been adjourned until December 2. In a surprise move, the President appointed Vice President Samsumana to oversee the ministry in Minister Koroma's absence.

¶3. (C) Sources told Political Section that Koroma's indictment appears deliberately timed to make a good impression on donors before the Consultative Group meeting. According to several contacts, the ACC presented the indictment to the Attorney General (AG), who buried it for two months before it was moved forward in the court. If this is true, this is in direct contravention of the 2008 ACC amendment, which grants the ACC prosecutorial independence from the Attorney General/Minister of Justice. A few whispers have also suggested that the AG and others intended to eliminate the case outright.

MINISTER OF STATE GIVEN SURPRISE AX

¶4. (C) Minister of State in the Vice President's Office, Leonard Balogun Koroma, was permanently removed from his position on November 4. The Minister of State acts as the Vice President's Chief of Staff, and manages the office's day-to-day affairs. While no one expected Koroma's ousting,

it has clearly been in the works for some time; the President has already announced that Dr. Komba Kono will replace him. Koroma was largely unpopular, and received the appointment because of his personal relationship with the Vice President in Kono and the United States. Anyone in Samsumana's orbit, whether earned or not, is shadowed with his reputation for corruption and criminality (reftel), and Koroma has been rumored to accept bribes and "assist" business contacts. It is possible that he is serving as a scapegoat for Samsumana's recent bad press, but equally possible that he simply wasn't effectively handling his duties.

15. (U) Post has little information about Koroma's replacement, Komba Kono. Like the VP and Leonard Balogun Koroma, he is from Kono District, and is a career medical practitioner. Post will report further details septel.

COMMENT

16. (C) The Minister of Health's indictment and removal leads to a number of critical questions: did the President, Attorney General, and others collude to delay the indictment to maximize its political impact? Why was the AG given any authority whatsoever over the independent ACC's case? Why was the Vice President named to oversee the ministry, rather than the deputy minister? Post deems it possible that the ACC was told to share the case with the AG due to its politically sensitive nature, and that the President, AG, and others deliberately timed the indictment to coincide with the build-up to the Consultative Group. Donors, particularly the

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British, have shown a keen interest in anti-corruption activities, and this case represents the first time that a public official has been charged with the abuse of office and position offenses. The Vice President's new role as de facto Minister of Health is likely a demonstration of the President's faith in him, despite the reftel scandal that is now in the public domain since the publication of the third party complaint in the SLPP newspaper last week. In similar situations, such as Ibrahim Kemoh Sesay's fall as Minister of Transportation and Aviation due to his connection to the July 2008 cocaine bust, the deputy minister was named as the acting minister: that Samsumana has been charged with overseeing the ministry shows that the APC party is backing him to help him politically survive the lawsuit. It also indicates that the APC will likely block an ACC investigation into the alleged corrupt acts that led to the lawsuit in the first place. Minister Balogun Koroma's removal could be seen as a means of cleaning house in the Vice President's Office, though most would argue that the real problem in the office is Samsumana himself. End Comment.

FEDZER